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RICHARD HICKMAN HARTE¹

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RICHARD HICKMAN HARTE was born in Rock Island, Illinois, October 23, 1855. He passed his entire professional life in Philadelphia and died, November 14, 1925, at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Dr. Harte was graduated from the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania in 1878, and received his early training in surgery in the University Hospital as assistant to Agnew and to Ashhurst; and later in the Pennsylvania Hospital, where he became a surgical chief in 1893. He also served as surgeon to the Episcopal Hospital (1889-1904), to St. Mary's Hospital (1893-1899), and to the Orthopædic Hospital (1904-1914).

Possessed of an ample fortune, Dr. Harte may be said to have practiced his profession as Johann Sebastian Bach wrote music, "for the glory of God and for a pleasant occupation." He never had a very large private practice, but delighted in his work in the hospital wards, paying particular attention to the old, the helpless, and the miserable, especially to those unfortunates whose sojourn is long in the dreary dwellings which border on the shades of death. Though never of very robust physique himself, he radiated an atmosphere of cheerfulness and hope among his patients and they cherished his visits and appreciated his neatness and gentleness in dressing their wounds more than his operative skill, of which they knew nothing.

Between the ages of 50 and 60 years, Dr. Harte gradually withdrew from practice and resigned, one after another, all of his hospital appointments except that of surgeon to the Pennsylvania Hospital.

Elected a Fellow of the American Surgical Association in 1895, he soon became an active and interested member, rarely missing the annual meetings and contributing a number of valuable papers to its *Transactions*. From 1900 to 1909, he served as recorder, until his election as president of the association in 1910.

Of Dr. Harte's war service, it is impossible to speak adequately. Feeling very strongly the call of duty to assist the Allies, he left his home and his many engagements in this country early in 1916, and served for many months in the American Hospital at Neuilly-sur-Seine (Paris). Returning to Philadelphia in

¹Taken from the article entitled, "In Memoriam. Richard H. Harte, M.D., C.M.G., Hon. F.R.C.S. (Ire.) 1855-1925." By Astley P. C. Ashhurst, M.D. *Transactions of the American Surgical Association*, 1926.

the autumn of 1916, and foreseeing the entrance of the United States into the conflict, he set about organizing two base hospital units, one in connection with the Pennsylvania Hospital, which became Base Hospital No. 10, A.E.F.; the other in connection with the Episcopal Hospital, which became Base Hospital No. 34, A.E.F. As director of Base Hospital No. 10, he left for France in the spring of 1917, and remained on active duty in France until after the armistice. During his absence he had the greatest sorrow of his life, the death of his wife, but he sought to forget his grief in constant activity, saying that he knew it would be her wish for him to complete the task he had undertaken, and he never faltered. He was rapidly promoted to the rank of colonel, and illness alone prevented him on his return to this country in the winter of 1918 from serving as chief surgeon of the Walter Reed General Hospital, Washington, D. C.

He received from General Pershing a citation for "exceptionally meritorious and conspicuous service." His work with the British Army was of such importance that it was mentioned in dispatches by General Haig, and later Dr. Harte was made a companion in the British Order of St. Michael and St. George. The King of the Belgians decorated him as companion in the Order of Leopold, and he was made honorary fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland for "conspicuous service rendered to the British Expeditionary Forces." From our own country, he received the Distinguished Service Medal.

Dr. Harte wrote very little. He took special interest in the surgical complications of typhoid fever, and published a number of important papers on perforation of, and hæmorrhage from, the intestines during that disease. He had probably the largest personal experience of such complications of any surgeon in the world.

Dr. Harte had a rare intuition of diagnosis and prognosis, a surgical judgment which was almost infallible, and operated with an ease and deftness which I have never seen equaled either in this country or abroad. Every scalpel that he used seemed sharp, tissues fell asunder as if by magic and with nearly complete absence of bleeding, ligatures dropped from his fingers as if already tied, and wounds healed with the most surprising rapidity and with the minimum of scarring. It was with the deepest regret that his assistants saw him abandon his career as operating surgeon so comparatively early in life. He resumed it only for a short time in France during the War, and was delighted that the first patient on whom he operated at the front, a soldier with multiple gunshot perforations of the bowel, made an excellent recovery.

He was, as I have said, never robust. Subject to bronchial inflammations, he rarely passed a winter without being in bed for a few days on one or more occasions. He also suffered a good deal from a stiff and painful shoulder, due to what he called "neuritis," which made him miserable sometimes for weeks at a time. When he was run down, nothing would restore his health as soon



RICHARD H. HARTE
1855-1925



as a river trip or coasting expedition, either in his own yacht or in that of his bosom friend, Dr. William J. Mayo.

Leaving Philadelphia with a bad cold and with his arm in a sling, on November 2, 1925, he joined Dr. Mayo on his boat on the Mississippi River two days later at Memphis, had a severe chill, and took to his bed at once. As soon as the presence of pneumonia was suspected, he was transferred to the hospital at Vicksburg, and there, on the shores of his favorite river, after a brave fight against the disease for more than a week, attended by Dr. Mayo and other friends, and with his children beside him, his spirit passed on to the other shore of the river of death. He had lived his life with a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

